The Holy See

*LETTER SENT BY THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE GRAND IMAM OF AL-AZHAR
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
IN SUPPORT OF JERUSALEM**

Excellency,

I received your letter of 16 December, concerning the Al-Azhar International Conference in support of Jerusalem, to take place on 17 January. I thank you for your courteous invitation, as well as for the kind expressions of esteem you expressed in my regard, which I warmly exchange.

As you have noted, on that day I will be engaged in an Apostolic Trip, but as of now I assure you that I will not fail to continue to invoke God for the cause of peace, of a true, real peace. In particular, I raise heartfelt prayers that the leaders of the Nations, and civil and religious authorities everywhere commit themselves to deterring newly spiralling tensions and to sustaining every effort to make harmony, justice and security prevail for the populations of that blessed land I so greatly care for.

The Holy See, for its part, will not cease to call urgently for a resumption of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians for a negotiated solution, aimed at the peaceful coexistence of two states within the borders agreed between them and internationally recognized, with full respect for the special nature of Jerusalem, whose meaning goes beyond any consideration of territorial issues. Only a special status, also internationally guaranteed, can preserve its identity, the unique vocation of the place of peace the sacred places recall, and its universal value, allowing a future of reconciliation and hope for the entire region.

This is the sole aspiration of those who profess themselves as authentic believers and who do not tire of imploring with prayer a future of fraternity for all. With these sentiments, I am glad to reiterate my cordial greeting, invoking from the Most High every blessing for your person and for the high responsibility you hold.

From the Vatican, 10 January 2018

Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, 18 January 2018